



Jesus and Brian: Exploring the Historical Jesus and his Times via Monty Python's Life of Brian

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Monty Python's *Life of Brian* film is known for its brilliant satirical humour. Less well known is that the film contains references to what was, at the time of its release, cutting edge biblical scholarship and Life of Jesus research. This research, founded on the acceptance of the Historical Jesus as a Jew who needs to be understood within the context of his time, is implicitly referenced through the setting of the Brian character within a tumultuous social and political background.

This collection is a compilation of essays from foremost scholars of the historical Jesus and the first century Judaea, and includes contributions from George Brooke, Richard Burridge, Paula Fredriksen, Steve Mason, Adele Reinhartz, Bart Ehrman, Amy-Jill Levine, James Crossley, Philip Davies, Joan Taylor, Bill Telford, Helen Bond, Guy Stiebel, David Tollerton, David Shepherd and Katie Turner. The collection opens up the *Life of Brian* to renewed investigation and, in so doing, uses the film to reflect on the historical Jesus and his times, revitalising the discussion of history and Life of Jesus research. The volume also features a Preface from Terry Jones, who not only directed the film, but also played Brian's mum.

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Editorial Review

Review

“I was astonished when I heard there was to be a conference where proper New Testament scholars would be discussing what they had learnt from Life of Brian! This is the result. Fascinating...” ?*John Cleese*

“Taken as a whole, the essays form a complete analytical documentation of the Life of Brian, and very interesting they are too! They take various angles and look at the film from not just a filmic one but from a historical point of view, and read many things I had not noticed at the time. The comparisons are always illuminating, and the commentaries always right on the nose.” ?*Terry Jones, Monty Python*

“This book is a great read for anyone interested in Monty Python's classic Life of Brian and the almost equally exciting world of biblical, early Jewish and Christian studies. Like undoubtedly many other colleagues I have used various scenes from the film in my classes on ancient Jewish religion and culture. I have learned a great deal of new things from the book. This book will now be mandatory reading for students. Catering to the needs of students of the biblical past, most chapters deal with ancient history and interpretation via the movie. The contributors write with humour and also very profound knowledge of ancient history, texts and contexts. In doing so, they often challenge the reader to go beyond some of the clichés surrounding the movie's understanding. And it's good to know that the Pythons got Pilate's dress right.” ?*Mladen Popovic, University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

“This diverse collection showcases the many ways a particular biblical film can direct our attention back to ancient texts and contexts with greater insight and critical awareness. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the Gospels, historical Jesus research, or biblical films. While reception analysis is emerging as a recognized sub-discipline of biblical studies worthy of pursuit in its own right, many still ask whether it can provide an exegetical pay off. This book responds affirmatively, as each author poses and attempts to answer the (adapted) question of “Reg” the Judean freedom fighter: “What have the Pythons [indeed, what has reception exegesis] done for us?” ?*Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, Eastern University, USA*

“[CC] This is not the silly book the title suggests it is. Rather, it is a serious (but not too serious) exploration of the Pythons' classic comedy *Life of Brian* vis-à-vis the historical Jesus and his *Sitz im Leben*. Emanating from the Jesus and Brian Conference held at King's College London (2014), the book is a great read for admirers of the Pythons in general and of the film in particular and for serious (but not too serious) New Testament scholars. The lectures-turned-essays are organized into two parts: ‘The Film in Its Cinematic Context, Its Reception, and Its Challenges’ and ‘History and Interpretation via *Monty Python's Life of Brian*.’ Both are interesting and at times fascinating. The first offers a glimpse of the movie before, while, and after it was made and released; the second gives readers a glimpse of the times in which Jesus lived. The book covers a potpourri of topics and offers much valuable scholarship. Both film students and students of the historical Jesus will find much to commend in this book. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty.” -W. J. Pankey, William Rainey Harper College, USA, *CHOICE*

About the Author

Joan E. Taylor is Professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College London, UK.

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